



## Tina Nappe: Wildlife will suffer if horses remain on the range

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To the extent that horse advocates are successful in stopping removal of wild horses from Nevada's public lands, Nevada's wildlife will suffer.

The Bureau of Land Management is implementing grazing policies developed by Nevada citizens, including horse advocates through Resource Advisory Councils. Protecting native plants and wildlife on Nevada's public lands is the foundation for BLM permitting other uses.

The Great Basin Desert ecosystems evolved over the last 10,000 years. The Great Basin Desert plants adapted to light grazing and light hoof prints. The most widespread of these hoofed historic animals, maybe numbering 30,000 at one time, is the bighorn sheep; a ram weighs about 160 pounds vs. a cow or horse at 1,000 pounds.

Grazing is plant predation. Establishing safe grazing systems for horses and livestock requires understanding plant requirements. If plants can't survive and reproduce, all animals suffer. Nevada's birds, reptiles, small mammals, hoofed species depend on native plants and public lands. Predators depend on healthy populations of rabbits, deer and squirrels to survive. With no removal, horses can and will out-compete every other herbivore on public lands.

raises a concern over plant survivability.

Comparing numbers of horses and cattle is misleading. Horses are on public lands 365 days a year; most cattle operations use private lands part of the year. Comparing the number of acres is also misleading; Nevada is the driest state in the union. The Black Rock playa, for instance, can't support horses. When fire consumes vegetation or drought occurs, BLM can order ranchers to remove livestock. As a result of range analysis and public pressure, Nevada livestock use has been halved over the past 30 years to protect plants, water and wildlife.

While ranchers and sportsmen contribute to the management costs of livestock and wildlife on public lands, BLM bears virtually the entire cost of horses. When horses have to be removed, BLM (the public) bears the cost of that removal and 15-20 years of lifetime care.

Wild horses are an appropriate and appreciated multiple use. BLM needs to demonstrate that it can maintain horse numbers within currently established areas and numbers before any expansion is proposed. BLM must be relieved of horses once they are removed from public lands.

The meager BLM budget cannot sustain an ever-increasing horse long-term care program. Horse numbers increase about 20 percent per year; they require continuous removal. The horses should be transferred to nonprofit animal groups, which are more experienced in providing adoption services. The savings from long-term care can be used for establishing horse herds competitive in the adoption market, range studies and protecting